

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Final version of news release
Date: 05 July 2024 11:17:34
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
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Dear all

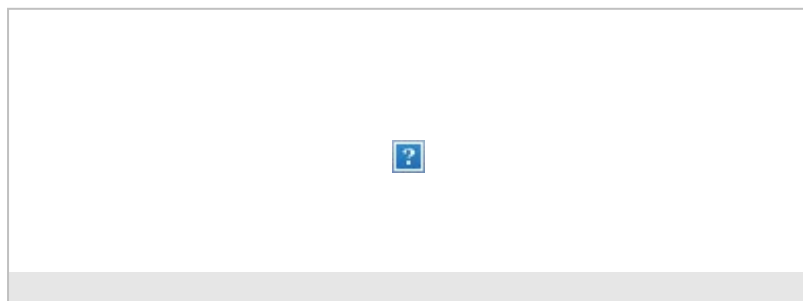
Thank you for your input into the below news release. We will be issuing it at 10am on Monday – pls do not share it further externally ahead of that time.

It is very similar to the previous version you saw – just with a few tweaks to order and a little shortening in places.

All the best,

[REDACTED]

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News release: Monday 8 July 2024

Independent report analyses Council's four-day week trial

An independent report by two universities - into South Cambridgeshire District Council's performance during its four-day week trial - has been published.

Of 24 key performance indicators monitored by the Council, analysis by the Universities of Cambridge and Salford found 22 improved or remained the same.

An independently run health and wellbeing survey has also been published. Both reports will be reviewed by councillors at the Employment and Staffing Committee on Monday 15 July and at a meeting of the Full Council on Thursday 18 July.

Under a four-day week, officers are expected to carry out 100 per cent of their work, in around 80% of their contracted hours, for 100 per cent of their pay. The Council's opening hours have been maintained so it has been open for business just as it was before the trial – with longer opening hours on Wednesdays too.

Researchers evaluated the Council's key areas of performance over several years – including during the full length of the four-day week trial from the beginning of 2023 to the end of March 2024.

11 measures were performing better during the trial, compared to beforehand. This covers areas such as call answering times, timeliness of planning decisions, how long it

takes to process benefits claims and speed of emergency repairs to Council homes. The areas found to have improved are:

- Percentage of calls to the Council's Contact Centre that were answered.
- The average number of days to process Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support changes.
- The percentage of emergency repairs to Council homes completed within 24 hours.
- The average number of weeks taken to determine householder planning applications.
- Major planning application decisions made in time.
- The percentage of major planning application decisions that get overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.
- Smaller planning application decisions made in time.
- The percentage of smaller planning application decisions that get overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.
- Staff turnover, which has dropped by almost 40 per cent.
- The percentage of complaints responded to within timescales.
- Invoices paid by the Council within 30 days.

A further 11 key performance indicators showed no significant differences during the trial – meaning those services continued to be delivered to the quality they were previously. The frequency of bin collections has also remained the same.

The two areas that were exceptions in terms of performance during the trial period were housing rent collected and average days to re-let housing stock. Housing rent collected either hit or was just below the Council's target in the 15 months of the trial. However, overall collection rates were below the long-term average, indicating that rent collection has not recovered to pre-Covid levels. The assumption is that this is likely due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on tenants' household finances.

Meanwhile, the target for the average number of days taken to re-let Council homes is very ambitious at 17 days. The top 25 per cent performing Councils in the country average 37 days to relet Council houses. In 2022/23 the average turnaround time for South Cambridgeshire District Council was 28 days; in 2023/24 it was 30 days. Returned Council homes now also often require extensive works which take longer to complete.

Daiga Kamerāde, Professor in Work and Wellbeing at the University of Salford said: "The trial suggests that a four-day work week maintains the quality of public services as measured by key performance indicators, while attracting new staff and improving workers' wellbeing. The pioneering trial can inspire evidence-based innovations in local councils and other organisations."

Professor Brendan Burchell from the Department of Sociology at Cambridge University added: "These results are supportive of moves to reduce the length of the working week but are not a surprise. In the past two years other researchers have studied many private sector employers in the UK and elsewhere that also reported the company's performance was maintained after a 20 per cent reduction in hours of work; employees and managers can find better ways of doing things to work more efficiently, given the right guidance and motivation."

As South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City councils share important services such as waste and planning – Cambridge City Councillors will also receive an update about the trial, and specifically how these shared services have performed.

Cllr Mike Davey, Leader of Cambridge City Council, said: "From the outset we've supported South Cambridgeshire District Council in trialling the four-day week as they

endeavour to find a solution to the recruitment and retention challenges we know councils are facing up and down the country. We've always said that the most important factor for us is ensuring that services for residents continue to be delivered reliably and to a high standard and have been keeping a close eye on this throughout the trial. It's fantastic to see the intended benefits to recruitment and retention are evident, and how this has had the desired impact on improving service delivery in many areas, including in our shared planning service. It seems to be a win-win-win situation, with improved service delivery for residents, reduced staffing costs for the council, and a better work-life balance for council staff."

There is also a financial assessment of the trial, which outlines a known full year cost saving of £371,500. This is mainly due to permanently filling 10 posts that were previously identified as 'hard to fill'. The financial saving has been made by not needing more expensive agency alternatives.

Meanwhile, recruitment data shows there has been a 53 per cent increase in the average number of applications for jobs advertised externally and more than 130 new staff have joined the Council. Of new starters, 76 per cent were influenced by the four-day week trial when deciding whether to join.

The findings of the latest independently run health and wellbeing survey by Robertson Cooper show higher employee commitment, with more staff reporting they intend to stay longer working for the Council, a key factor in reducing turnover and high vacancy rates. Mental and physical health and motivation have also risen.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr John Williams, said: "The independent analysis from the Universities of Cambridge and Salford paints a positive picture with 22 out of the 24 services either improving or remaining the same during the four-day week trial. Coupled with the hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayer money that we have saved, improved recruitment and retention and positives around health and wellbeing – this brave and pioneering trial has clearly been a success. All District Councillors will now be able to discuss these reports at our upcoming meetings. Our approach has been centred around improving the consistency of services to residents and businesses – by helping us attract and keep hold of talented staff in a hugely competitive job market in Greater Cambridge where the cost of living is high. We know we cannot compete on salary alone and have needed to find bold new ways of tackling our recruitment and retention issues."

The Council introduced the four-day week trial in a bid to improve services by filling hard-to-fill posts permanently, rather than relying on more expensive agency staff, which can also be disruptive. For example, when bin lorry drivers leave, it can disrupt collections when new drivers are learning bin routes or agency drivers cover them as replacements are trained. 11 lorry drivers left the Council in 2022, but only five did in 2023 after bin crews joined the trial.

Since the formal trial finished at the end of March 2024, four-day week working at the Council has continued whilst the Council awaits information from Government.

During last year's Local Government Finance Settlement consultation, the previous Government consulted on the potential of using financial levers to discourage councils from adopting four-day weeks. Until there is more clarity on this, Cabinet members considered it not feasible for the Council to carry out a meaningful consultation of its own and decide on next steps. You can read more about the Council's four-day week [on its website](#).

Ends

Notes to Editors

The report due to be considered by the Council's Employment and Staffing Committee and Full Council can be found at:

<https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=9795&x=1>

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